

● THE shopping mall has become one of modern day life's greatest assets. Everything under one roof. It is not surprising therefore to have a film set almost completely under the decorative roof of one and it brings together the talents of Woody Allen and Bette Midler. The project has been co-written, produced and directed by Paul Mazursky who says, "Real life used to take place in the streets and town squares, but today people spend a lot of their time shopping in malls. Whatever can happen in your life can happen in a mall. This seems to be particularly true in Los Angeles where people walk around practically in their underwear." Not that we see Allen and Midler shopping in their underwear, although Woody does strip Bette down to hers in one of the movie's earlier bedroom scenes.

They play a married couple celebrating their 16th wedding anniversary. All appears to be just dandy between them until they go to the local shopping mall where Woody – out of the blue – suddenly confesses to wife Bette that he's been having an affair which ended only "yesterday". Not just one affair, either, but others in the past. Naturally she blows her top but it transpires she's also hiding a secret from her husband.

Bette and Woody are on screen together for almost the film's entire running time, locked in a verbal battle in a public place fighting a very private war. And their day had started so well, with Bette having bought Woody a surf board as his present, and Woody having presented Bette with hers – an



KEN FERGUSON
reviews the fascinating
screen partnership of
WOODY ALLEN and
BETTE MIDLER
in a movie directed by
PAUL MAZURSKY

SCENES FROM A MALL

antique framed colour photo of their family. But such niceties quickly change to varying degrees of highly-charged emotions during their visit to the mall.

The mall of the movie is in fact a combination of two real malls, one in Beverly Hills, the other in Stamford, Connecticut, and a huge set built on a stage at the Kaufman Astoria Studios in New York.

Woody Allen hasn't been directed by another director since he worked with Martin Ritt on *The Front* in 1976. Since then he's directed all his own movies. But working with Mazursky proved interesting for him. "I wanted to see what the experience would be like," says Woody, "and it was better than I had imagined. Paul is truly one of the great raconteurs. He's extremely engaging, fun to work with and a wonderful storyteller."

Midler and Mazursky had previously worked together on *Down And Out In Beverly Hills*. Getting Woody and Midler together

for the same movie is an interesting casting coup. But does it work? Read on...

VERDICT

● This is virtually a two-hander movie giving the two stars all the close-ups, medium shots and long shots they could ever wish for. Woody, the screen's most anxiety-ridden character, and Bette, one of its most forceful and ebullient actresses, combine to present us with a rather laboured portrait of two people facing a marital break-up, two people it seems who won't be able to cope without each other.

They are given full rein by director Mazursky (who also appears as a TV image) to fully flesh out the characters written for them.

Their portrayal of changing moods and emotions – at one point they make passionate love in a half-empty cinema where *Saleem Bombay* is on view – are effective and played out in this incredible mall where nobody,

except an intrusive mime artist (Bill Irwin), is taking any notice of them and their rapidly deteriorating relationship. But the constant bickering and changes of mood and feelings for each other not only wears them down but is in danger of wearing down the tolerance of an audience who will be drawn to see this fascinating screen twosome.

The film works very well for about half its running time, and then I'm afraid it tends to pall in the mall. But as a study of two married people trying to come to terms with the other's indiscretions, *Scenes From A Mall* has some good moments.

Producer/Director
PAUL MAZURSKY

Screenplay
ROGER L SIMON/PAUL MAZURSKY

Photography
FRED MURPHY

Music

MARC SHAIMAN

88 Minutes – Certificate 15
(TOUCHSTONE)

Deborah	....	BETTE MIDLER
Nick	....	WOODY ALLEN
Mime Artist	....	BILL IRWIN
Sam	....	DAREN FIRESTONE
Jennifer	....	REBECCA NICKELS
Dr Hans Clava	....	PAUL MAZURSKY

RATINGS

SCRIPT 6

PERFORMANCES 7

PRODUCTION 7

DIRECTION 6

ENTERTAINMENT VALUE 6

MAY 1991

FILM
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